

BROTHERS AS ALLIES PROJECT: A STRENGTHS-BASED CURRICULUM FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Cornell Evaluation Shows Efficacy in Some Outcomes

Cornell University's ACT for Youth Adolescent Health Unit and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) were awarded a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to evaluate the efficacy of the One Circle Foundation's *Brothers As Allies*® curriculum for early adolescent males to reduce risk for future sexual violence perpetration, conducted between 2016 and 2021. 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men report having experienced sexual violence, and of those who report, 33% of females and 25% of males report being 11 - 17 years old when their first sexual assaults occurred. Multi-racial and ethnic youth, females, and LGBTQ+ youth experience greater rates of sexual violence. While research exists on prevention and interventions for college age youth, little evidence exists for programs that target pre-teens and early adolescent youth.

The target population for the intervention were middle school boys of diverse backgrounds, ages 12-14, who live in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities within the 4 regions served by the NYSDOH's Rape Prevention and Education Program (RPE) Regional Centers, primarily located in Western NY (Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Rochester NY) with additional sites in rural Oxford and eastern Capitol District of the state of NY.

STUDY: The Council for Boys and Young Men program was implemented using the Brothers as Allies curriculum, a waitlist control design to accommodate the desire of the study sites assigned to the control condition, 22 participating sites in after school programming, 17 intervention cycles, 15 control cycles and 4 sites that started as control and crossed over into intervention sites, and a total of 379 participants (341 with at least one time point of usable data and 271 with at least 2 timepoints of useable data).

The primary focus of the study was to evaluate outcomes linked to sexual assault: a) sexual perpetration & victimization, b) sexual harassment and c) bystander behavior. Secondary outcomes of interest included social connection, masculinity beliefs, drug and alcohol use, bystander responses, and more.

Implementation and data collection processes were disrupted by the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which effectively ended the programming and data collection. However, data from pre and post surveys with experiment and control (waitlist) groups was gathered for 271 participants.

RESULTS: The intervention was considered effective for some outcomes¹.

From Time 1 (pre-survey before first session) to Time 2 (post survey following completion of the curriculum), compared to the youth in the control groups, participants in The Council for Boys and Young Men/Brothers as Allies groups showed:

- Higher reports of victimization. *Evaluators suggest that this finding may reflect broader awareness of sexual aggression and violence as a result of program participation.*

¹ Whitlock, J., Foley, A.M., Maley, M., (2021). Brothers as Allies, A Strengths-Based Curriculum for Sexual Violence Prevention: Cornell University and NY State Department of Health. Slideshow PDF.

- Lower sexual violence perpetration
- Lower reported sexual harassment of others, such as touching, pinching, grabbing, sexual graffiti, sexual blocking
- More likely to tell someone how they feel
- Less likely to call someone “homo” or “gay” if they thought the person was gay

The researchers state, “Overall, the intervention showed few notable effects, but did show direct effects of the intervention on sexual victimization and perpetration. More specifically, participants in the BAA group reported greater sexual victimization than members of the control group at time point 2, a finding which may reflect broader awareness of sexual aggression and violence as a result of program participation. BAA participants were significantly less likely to report having forced someone to do something sexual, other than kissing in the past month at time point 2 compared to the control group and reported significantly less a) sexually harassing behavior, b) sexual touching, pinching or grabbing and c) blocking or cornering with sexual intent when compared to the control group from baseline to the second time point.”²

Lessons learned³ from the study overall included:

- 13-14 year old boys are more ready developmentally to engage in the content of BAA curriculum. Sixth graders were less comfortable with the content.
- Boys wanted to continue. They valued the experience of the group and the safe space.
- Facilitators wished the groups could continue for the youth. Consistency matters.
- While all facilitators were certified through training on The Council for Boys and Young Men model, facilitators who deliver the BAA curriculum may be more effective when they receive training and/or coaching on the specific topics and activities within the BAA program itself.
- For researchers, partnerships are key, as is a careful planning process with them. An extensive set of recommendations for researchers interested in working with partners is provided in the report, concerning design, communication and planning, flexibility, and more.

² Cornell, Brothers as Allies, Final Report to the CDC, 2021, as provided to One Circle Foundation.

³ Maley, M., Whitlock, J., Baum, V., Foley, A.M., Purington Drake, A., Powers, J., (2021). Lessons Learned: Testing a Strengths-Based Curriculum for Violence Prevention. Brothers as Allies Project.